

Ethically Unethical:

A Look into the Humanity and Implications of Nazi Science

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Emily Rapoza

Thesis Advisors

Dr. Brent Blackwell

Professor Edward Krzemienski

May 2014

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2014

Abstract

The concept of “Ethically Unethical” is the creation of a series of researched aspects of Nazi science and the implications that this has upon the regime as a whole. The lack of focus upon Nazi science creates a void in the wake of Nazi propaganda and Jewish concentration camps. With this space needing to be desperately filled, there needs to be more insight into the overall projects of Nazi science under the regime.

In looking at specific aspects of Nazi science, those focused upon are topics often glossed over in history books if they are mentioned at all. There is a serious misunderstanding of euthanasia under the Nazi regime and it is one that needs to be clearly explained. Dr. Hermann Pfannmüller, Dr. Karl Brandt, and Dr. Christian Wirth offer an in-depth look into examples of Nazi scientists overcome with promises of the regime; yet there are differences between the three as to their motivations, their roles and their impact upon the scientific community under the Reich. The Buchenwald center is a work camp that is often mentioned in passing, yet had serious implications both for the political prisoners held there and for the doctors that participated in experiments there.

The overall make-up of this presentation hopes to accurately tell and justify certain aspects of the Nazi science program that have not been mentioned into common conversations when regarding the Nazi programs of World War II. Each aspect combines to create a thread of history that centralizes around a political and social regime, and in such can be found veins worth uncovering to gain more and more insight into the makeup of such a structure.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Brent Blackwell for advising me throughout this project. He was incredibly helpful and I would not have been able to complete this daunting task without his oversight, aid, and can-do attitude. I would also like to thank him for allowing me to borrow most, if not all, of his Nazi science books and media.

I would like to thank Professor Ed Krzeminski for his continual support and his willingness to blend his expertise with my project. His aid in completing numerous amounts of departmental paperwork is beyond appreciated.

I would also like to thank J.R. and Pat, Jimmy, and all those who have aided me in finding research or have patiently listened to me discuss my thesis.

"I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald. I reported what I saw and heard, but only part of it. For most of it, I have no words. If I have offended you by this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I'm not in the least sorry...."

- Edward R. Murrow, CBS Reporter

April 11, 1945. The 6th Armored Division, a part of the American Third Army heads towards the camp labeled "Buchenwald." 21,000 prisoners were liberated, yet over 28,000 had been previously evacuated by German troops in hopes to cover the massive size of the camp.¹ American troops were immediately faced with a harsh reality: the prisoners that they were faced with were barely human, the remnants of their uniforms were barely recognizable, and their eyes were beyond sunken in.²

American soldiers began to explore the camp. They found barracks that were little more than bedframes with five or more prisoners crowded onto them. The smell of rotting bodies, both living and dead, hung throughout the air like smog.³ The hospital had records of 200 dying there, mostly of tuberculosis, starvation, fatigue, and an overall loss of will to live.⁴ Those that were seen feebly breathing were incapacitated and could not move.⁵

¹ "Buchenwald Liberation Photos Show Holocaust Horrors On Anniversary Of Nazi Concentration Camp Closing." *The World Post*. The Huffington Post, 11 Apr. 2013. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

² "Edward R. Murrow's Report From Buchenwald." *Edward R. Murrow's Report From Buchenwald*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, n.d. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

³ "Edward R. Murrow."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Edward Murrow, a reporter from CBS, recorded his interaction with a doctor of the camp:

They called the doctor. We inspected his records. There were only names in the little black book - nothing more - nothing about who had been where, what he had done or hoped. Behind the names of those who had died, there was a cross. I counted them. They totaled 242 - 242 out of 1200, in one month.

Murrow continued to look around the camp and discovered that about 20,000 prisoners were in the camp on that fateful day in April 1945, but there had been as many as 60,000 total allowed into the camp.⁶ The fact that these bodies could not be accounted for and that there was a lack of any records of these prisoners left much up to speculation.

The more American soldiers looked around they began to notice that there were places presumed to be under medical affiliation that did not match the typical criteria. The hospital and the pathological block were two areas of the immensely dark and hidden past of Nazi science and practice. The lack of bodies, the missing or incomplete medical records, and the numerous medical facilities did not add up.

American soldiers entered into a small concrete building labeled Block 2. It was later identified in the Nuremberg Trials as the "pathological block" that housed

⁶ Ibid.

tattooed prisoners.⁷ Inside the block there were copious amounts of skinned prisoners and tanned human skin.⁸

What the American soldiers had stumbled upon was the dark and hidden practice of Nazi science and experimentation. Buchenwald was the first of many rabbit holes that would surface in the decades following the war. The secrets and entirely unbelievable atrocities that would be uncovered were lurking just out of sight from the Allies, and from history at large.

Though most of the Nazi concentration camps remain in present memory, the name Buchenwald tends to take a backseat to Auschwitz, Dachau, and Belzec. Perhaps this unintentional avoidance is partially due to the nature of the camp; it was not officially an extermination center, which means it does not contain the staggering numbers of victims like the aforementioned camps. Buchenwald offers further insight into the Nazi concentration of prisoners, as well as into the realm of Nazi science and experimentation. Buchenwald's history sheds light upon the treatment of political prisoners who were considered inferior under the Nazis.

Buchenwald is much like a doorway into these discoveries. The facilities it housed, along with the doctors and hierarchy that it was exposed to creates a focused leap into this obscure, and mostly unexplored, venue of medical science and murder.

⁷ "Buchenwald Concentration Camp (Germany)." *Buchenwald Concentration Camp (Germany)*. Ancestry.com and Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2014. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

⁸ Ibid.

T-4 and Euthanasia: Not Left In Common Memory

In looking at case studies throughout facets of Nazi science, there is an importance to initially describe and explain the terms that are pertinent to the understanding of the experiments and orders that were given under the Nazi Regime. The scientists who were under this control were subjected to numerous restrictions and allowances, but ultimately, those who are hereafter discussed all were partaking in the concept of euthanasia under the T-4 program.

In order to accurately distinguish euthanasia in modern memory from the actual implementations under the Nazi regime; there are numerous misconceptions about the actual program and what it relates to in more recent terms. Generally, euthanasia is connected with “mercy killings” in the 1900’s and then the phrase became synonymous with “physician-assisted suicide.”⁹ This is an incorrect assessment by the western world. The induced killings that were performed by the scientists under the Third Reich were not “mercy killings,” but rather were the eradication of those unfit to live and/or produce offspring.¹⁰

The T-4 program, which is also referred to as the Medical Killing program under the Nazis, was the main program that was implemented to help create the master race. The program was, at first glance, simplistic in its goals: remove all those who were ‘unfit’ to belong in the general population. This was determined by

⁹ "The Nazi Euthanasia (T-4) Program." *Background & Overview of the Nazi Euthanasia (T-4) Program*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2014. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.

¹⁰ Ibid.

a list of credentials held by the Nazi party.¹¹ Initially, the program was to select and kill medically the adults who presided in sanatoriums and asylums, thereby eradicating mental inabilities from the ultimate “perfect race.”¹² Dr. Philip Bouhler and Dr. Karl Brandt were selected to be the directions of the *Euthanasie Programme*, which was later referred to as T-4.¹³

T-4 received its name from the address that it was located at, Tiergartenstrasse 4, which was the location of the Berlin Chancellery. Shortly after its creation, the public discovered the programs’ strategies; there was an attempt to stop the killing of those considered “unfit” by the Nazi regime.¹⁴ Those at T-4 responded by “ending” the program and sending their physicians out into the camps to select those who fell into the “unfit” category of life. Generally, those selected were considered unfit for either physical or mental disabilities.¹⁵ The action that they were sent out under was referred to simply as 14f13 (due to the reference number found in the files of the Concentration Camp Inspectorate).¹⁶ Ultimately, the 14f13 program was the transportation of criminals and unfit individuals to killing centers to remove them from German society.

Once the physicians were out in the camps, SS personnel were tasked with rounding up those who fit the profile to be medically killed. Generally, there was rumor of a questionnaire that the prisoners filled out, but the questions only

¹¹ Lifton, Robert J. *The Nazi Doctors: Med. Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*. London: Macmillan, 1986. Print. Pg. 95

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "The Nazi Euthanasia (T-4) Program."

¹⁴ Lifton, Robert J. Pg.95

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lifton, Robert. Pg. 96

pertained to the mental stability of the prisoners, rather than that of their medical history.¹⁷ The process was simply the paperwork needed to justify the killing process should it ever be perceived by the government or by the public.

One portion of the T-4 paperwork that is reflective of the entirety of the program is the overall organization that was indicative of the Nazi bureaucracy. Traditional medical examinations took place; at least they appeared to on the books. Directors were sent to visit hospitals, asylums, sanatoriums, and psychiatric institutions and they, along with S.S. officials, filled out the forms on patients deemed “unfit,” and they were delivered to the T-4 headquarters. At this point, the records were then looked over by the resident physicians who decided the ultimate fate of these patients, even though they had not examined the patients or their medical records at all.¹⁸

It should be noted that as part of the T-4 program, most if not all of the German psychiatric community was involved, and there was, after a short time, the creation of a new psychiatric community.¹⁹ Under Brandt and Bouhler’s order to “expand the authority of physicians so that patients considered incurable be granted a mercy killing,” the new community allowed for physicians to delve into the concept of eugenics or “applied biology.”²⁰ There was a specific criterion that deemed certain people “unworthy of life,” and that was not entirely genetic-dependent (as is implied under the concept of eugenics); rather, the criterion was

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Berenbaum, Michael. “T4 Program (Nazi Policy).” *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2 Jan. 2014. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

almost entirely economic. The Nazi officials regarded certain levels of their population as more economically productive than others; those who fell into the latter category were generally referred to as “useless eaters” or “burdensome lives.”²¹

The implementation of the euthanasia T-4 program depended upon the creation of special carbon-monoxide chambers. Initially, the patients were subjected to starvation and lethal injections, but it was soon found that asphyxiation was preferred.²² This can be attributed to the fact that the process was deemed faster and more administrable than starvation, which took weeks, or injections, that required doctors to administer the dosage. The number of people killed in the T4 and the 14f13 projects vary slightly, but the adults killed number around 80,000 to 100,000 and the number of children killed average around 5,000. It is crucial to note that at this point, there was not a focus upon the eradication of those of Jewish descent (about 1,000 of the total adults were Jewish).²³

The issues with any statistics, especially those coming out from under the Nazi regime are the levels of deception and destruction of paperwork. It is very likely that there will never be a solid number of actual deaths that occurred due to the T-4 program; it is very likely that all these numbers could be doubled which would be a more realistic look as to the detrimental nature of this program.²⁴

The T-4 centers were located in six different centers throughout Germany and Austria: Hartheim, Sonnenstein, Grafeneck, Bernburg, Hadamar, and

²¹ Ibid.

²² Berenbaum, Michael.

²³ Lifton, Robert J. *Nazi Doctors*. Pg. 142

²⁴ Ibid.

Brandenburg.²⁵ These centers were considered to be the forerunners to the concentration camps, specifically Auschwitz.²⁶ All the victims were removed from a medical institution and were transferred to a location, which resulted in their premature death.²⁷ The S.S. officers who were stationed at these locations and they all wore white lab coats in order to keep up the façade of each center being a legitimate hospital.²⁸ The families of those involved as patients in the program were informed of the transfers to “new centers” for “medical procedures,” but were not allowed to visit their family members.²⁹ A few weeks later, there was the receiving of condolence letters, falsified death records and even urns containing ashes.³⁰

The impact of this type of euthanasia matches entirely with the Nazi philosophy of perfecting a master race. There was an immediate threat to this “ideal race” and that was the mental, physical, and economical issues that occurred in the German, and eventually the European, society.

The ideas, concepts, and implications of the euthanasia project under T-4 filter through to all the physicians and camps that are hereafter contained. The crucial understanding of the Nazi psyche allows for insight into the bending of ethical codes to benefit unethical treatment that ultimately results in a better human race.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Meltzer, Milton. *Never to Forget*, New York: HarperCollins, 1976. 131

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Berenbaum, Michael.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

The understanding of T-4 and of euthanasia under the Nazi party is crucial in truly looking at the horrors and monstrosities that occurred under the following men. Euthanasia in its different stages was inflicted to varying degrees under these party members.

Dr. Hermann Pfannmüller entered into the world of T-4 and did all in his ability to expand the field. He is not thought of as a psychiatrist, but rather more of a sadistic man in a lab coat who had a specialization and disturbing interest in starvation, especially in children.

Pfannmüller represents the first stage of T-4 in that his most well known experiments focused around the starvation of those considered “unfit” in the Volk. As the science expanded and more avenues appeared which allowed for rapid changes in experimentation, meaning that Pfannmüller was free to continue his experimentations, especially if he was set on creating the Master race.

It is important to note that with his joining of the Nazi party in 1933, there is no doubt that Pfannmüller was simply seizing an opportunity to advance his career. He was not an original Nazi and was not an ideologue. This, perhaps, makes his studies even more menacing; Pfannmüller did not subscribe to the ideals of the Nazi party, but rather twisted their mantras to meet his own personal need to experiment and exploit the “unfit” population in Germany.

The overall lack of humanity that surrounds Pfannmüller is disturbing especially considering that Psychiatrists involved in the Nazi regime are commonly justified in present-day minds as being blinded by the lack of restrictions placed around their studies. There is a certain level of humanity that the present-day

wishes to place upon the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime. One blatant and jarring observation can be found in regards to Dr. Hermann Pfannmüller. Pfannmüller can be regarded as one of the most inhumane psychiatrists to grace not only the Nazi regime, but also the entire field of psychiatry. A look into his background, accompanied by the life philosophy that he upheld may, in part, offer insight into the strategies and experiments that he employed and supervised.

Medically Murderous:

Dr. Hermann Pfannmüller and the Expansion of T4

Hermann Pfannmüller joined the Nazi party in May of 1933; this was also the transition of him as a doctor into a corrupted Nazified psychiatrist.³¹ At this point, he had free reign over his programs, which were initially upheld only in child wards, but would eventually expand into hospitals and mainly mental facilities.³² Dr. Gerhard Schmidt, an anti-Nazi psychiatrist who took over Pfannmüller's institution after the war accurately described the Nazi doctor as a soft-depressive type.³³ Schmidt goes on that explain that Pfannmüller overcame his own anxious behaviors and death imagery by creating a scenario in which he felt omnipotent, though he was also increasingly sadistic as well.³⁴ In this vein, Schmidt argues, Pfannmüller remains the epitome of the brutalized physician-turned-killer.³⁵ This revelation, along with other disturbing features of his character, creates an unsettling regard for science in which the end always justifies the means. A look into his personal philosophy reflects this disconcerting sentiment.

The partial reasoning for Pfannmüller's joining of the Nazi party is due to his philosophy of "Life unworthy of Life," a mantra that accurately describes his

³¹ Lifton, Robert J. *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*. London: Macmillan, 1986. Print. 119

³² "Röder, Thomas, Volker Kubillus, and Anthony Burwell. *Psychiatrists-- the Men behind Hitler: The Architects of Horror*. Los Angeles: Freedom Pub., 1995. Print.

³³ Lifton, 120.

³⁴ Röder.

³⁵ Lifton, 120.

practices after 1933.³⁶ As described in multiple accounts, Pfannmüller was known for his treatments of children in psychiatric wards. Pfannmüller was known for selecting patients that best suited his experimentations, taking a special interest in them, and watching as the starvation progressed to varying degrees.

Schmidt attempts to understand the reasoning behind why a gentle man who would not hurt a fly had such a passion for euthanasia projects that were, in his mind, “urgently necessary.”³⁷ Likewise, this philosophy of debasing a certain people in order to overcome personal struggles reflects the Nazi view of the “undesirables” in a nation.³⁸ By placing a race or a group of people as less than human, there is a created justification in abusing them in order to benefit the race that sits at the top of the hierarchy. Pfannmüller himself summed up the situation accurately by saying “The idea is unbearable to me that the best, the flower of our youth must lose its life at the front in order that feebleminded and irresponsible asocial elements can have a secure existence in the asylum.”³⁹ The idea behind a hierarchy of race allows for the mistreatment and disregard for human life.

This view was not far off base from other professionals in the field. Dr. Alfred Hoche, a psychiatrist like Pfannmüller, gave explanation to euthanasia that can be perceived as rational and sane: “is there human life which has so completely lost its legal value that its continuation has permanently lost all value both for the bearer of

³⁶ Lifton, 120-121.

³⁷ Lifton, 120.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Lifton, 62.

that life and for society?"⁴⁰ Pfannmüller and others in his field were proponents of cleansing not only the German population, but the general population as well, from the diseases and "asocial elements" found in certain individuals.

The interesting aspect to regard is that the children selected were not classified as Jewish, but rather were German children from the Volk. This fact alone shows that not only was Pfannmüller wholly engrossed in the Nazi philosophy to rid the world of undesirable lineages, but also he was willing to go after children who had come from the same race as himself. Pfannmüller had little, if any, boundaries when it came to eradicating children who did not meet his standards.

Though, to a point, Pfannmüller's mantra can be backed up by Nazi philosophy. It is worth recognizing that Pfannmüller was not entirely off base of the Nazi ideals in certain aspects of his studies. Potentially the most disturbing part of the entire sequence of events is the willingness of both medical and legal professionals who believed that certain patients would "benefit from a hastened death."⁴¹ Without the full consent and willingness of Pfannmüller, as well as other doctors under the Nazi influence, there would have been no circumstances in which the euthanasia process would have succeeded.⁴²

To a certain extent, it is plausible to consider that the "bending" of these scientists' ideals and morals creates a historical echo which reoccurs when present day issues of doctor induced/assisted suicide surface. Certainly the social and governmental structure today is far from Nazi Germany, but it does raise a large

⁴⁰ Cleaver, Cathleen A., and Edward Grant. "Lessons From History's Most Calamitous Experience." *Biography Resource Center*. Gale, n.d. Web. 8 Aug. 2013. 1

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

social and moral question of a doctor's role regarding the preserving or the ending of human life.⁴³ This bleeds into the present questions about doctor-assisted suicide as well as how far doctors should go in order to help sustain those under their care.

Hitler and his advocates saw a need to thoroughly cleanse the German public before any action could be taken in regards to other "undesirable" groups. Hitler went directly to doctors and psychiatrists to avoid the need for a bureaucracy; this aversion to the typical system created its own "bureaucracy" that was both "medical and murderous."⁴⁴ In 1939, Hitler set forth a decree (commonly referred to as the "Führer" or "T4" decree or *T4 Aktion*), which allowed the killings of sick, unfit individuals.⁴⁵ This decree was backdated to September 1, 1939 in hopes that the wartime atmosphere would make the general German populace more accepting of the conditions that would be employed.⁴⁶ There was also a level of sanity to this measure, if the moral aspect of humanity is disregarded: the expulsion of unfit individuals would not only make the country stronger in force and population, but would also free up hospitals, doctors, and medications for those who were wounded in the war. The fact that this decree can be logically justified to aid in the betterment of society is unnerving in itself.

Over time the "Führer" decree evolved into the T4 program.⁴⁷ Hitler's specific justification for this comes across as sensible, but only when it is considered that he

⁴³ Cleaver, 1-2.

⁴⁴ Röder.

⁴⁵ Lifton, 62.

⁴⁶ Lifton, 63.

⁴⁷ The T4 program received its name from the location. This was done in attempt to cover the actual nature of the processes that were occurring. The T4 program was

is was attempting to create a perfect and ideal state. Hitler spoke with Leonardo Conti, the secretary for Health in the Interior Ministry, and Hans Lammers, the head of the Reich Chancellery and explained the reasoning for the T4 program to expand: “[in] cases in which the mentally ill could only be bedded on sand or sawdust because they continually befouled themselves,” and in which “patients put their own excrement into their mouths, eating it and so on” it was necessary to remove them from society.⁴⁸ Hitler pointed out that in this way “a certain saving in hospitals, doctors, and nursing personnel could be brought about.”⁴⁹ The need to purify and make ready the new state of Nazi Germany allows the belief that this system is reasonable and even ideal in certain situations. The “mercy killings” of “unfit” individuals attempts to be presented as a “noble” thing in which members of the medical community would take part. Moreover, there was even more emphasis put upon ending the lives of those “unworthy of life” without the funding, cost and use of medicines.⁵⁰

Besides the “practical” side of this matter, the decree was also composed on Hitler’s own personal stationary. This suggests that Hitler found the mass extermination of sick persons “a private matter,” not something that needed to be addressed by the heads of state, as suggested by Alice Platen-Hallermund.⁵¹ The creation of this decree, along with the precautions taken by Hitler, in both the nature of the decree and the way in which it was expressed sans a bureaucratic

hidden under a false organization Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft Heil-und
Pflegeanstalten (RAG)[Lifton 65]

⁴⁸ Lifton, 62

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Röder.

⁵¹ Ibid.

progression, allow an insight into the lack of morality infused into the programs under the Nazis, specifically Pfannmüller.

Under the T4 program, Pfannmüller was no longer relegated to the euthanasia of children, but rather was spreading into the killings of adults as well. As described earlier, Hitler attempted to give some of his top physicians and medical professionals reason to believe that the extinguishing of adults and children aided in the strength of a nation; allowing these “people” to continue living could threaten the overall stability and success of the Volk.⁵² In 1943, Pfannmüller expanded his killing centers from children’s wards and created two *Hungerhausen* (“starvation houses”) which focused upon the starving of the older population.⁵³ Pfannmüller imposed a special diet (*sonderkost*) upon his patients. The diet was little more than barely enough food to survive for a few weeks⁵⁴. Pfannmüller had first implemented the *sonderkost* in November of 1942, where, at a conference held by the Bavarian Interior Ministry, commissioner of health Walter Schultze suggested the idea. Most doctors were hesitant, as one would expect, but Pfannmüller was thrilled and declared how he had “dramatically once grabbed a slice of bread from a nurse who wanted to give it to a patient.”⁵⁵ The implementation was not only a familiar process for Pfannmüller, but it was also one that he enjoyed to an extent.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Lifton, 62.

⁵⁴ Dr. Valentin Kaufbeuren ran his own child “euthanasia” center out of the Kaufbeuren Asylum (he also served at a T4 expert since 1940). He showed a basic example of the Sonderkost, which was totally fat-free: potatoes, yellow turnips and cabbage (usually green, sometimes red) cooked in water. The final result was “a slow death, which would ensue in about 3 months time.” [Lifton, 98]

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Pfannmüller and his colleagues at the euthanasia centers had a free pass on who was selected for extermination and who was to be starved out. As Pfannmüller took his seat at the head of the T4 program, the original forms required of patients in the T4 program were no longer necessary; this allowed his personal selection of patients that were to be sent to the gas chambers. Generally, whilst playing God, Pfannmüller would focus his starvation methods on those who were too ill to be sent to gassing chambers.⁵⁶ A motto of the Eglfling Center was "Give them no fat, they go on their own," this also reflected the menu at the Kaufbeuren Asylum (with the generous addition of a slice of bread). When these centers found that the lacking menu did not adequately complete the job, rations were cut or even eliminated in certain circumstances to ensure death.⁵⁷

An area that can most easily show the utter lack of compassion and human morality is found in the children's wards that have made Pfannmüller infamous today. One specific account shows Pfannmüller's focus upon the starvation of children, rather than the use of medical euthanasia. It occurred during a tour of his facility, a common occurrence as the Nazi party was keen to show the medical advancements that were being employed in the creation of the Master race. The caveat is, however, that Pfannmüller's methods were not revolutionary, nor were they truly medical; rather he was starving children to see the overall effects upon their bodies. The following is a Ludwig Lehner's description of the events⁵⁸:

⁵⁶ Lifton, 98-99.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Lehner was a Bavarian school teacher who was invited to review the premises of Pfannmüller's work.

'These "creatures" (children) naturally represent for me as a National Socialist only a burden for the healthy body of our Volk. We do not kill (he could have here used a euphemistic expression for this word kill) with poison, injections, etc.; then the foreign press and certain gentlemen in Switzerland would only have new inflammatory material. No, our method is much simpler and more natural, as you see.'

With these words, he pulled, with the help of a nurse, a child from its little bed. While he then exhibited the child like a dead rabbit, he asserted with a knowing expression and a cynical grin: For this one it will take two to three more days. The picture of this fat, grinning man, in his fleshy hand the whimpering skeleton, surrounded by other starving children, is still vivid in my mind. The murderer explained further then, that sudden withdrawal of food was not employed, rather gradual decrease of the rations. A lady who was also part of the tour asked — her outrage suppressed with difficulty — whether a quicker death with injections, etc., would not at least be more merciful. Pfannmüller then praised his methods again as more practical in view of the foreign press.

The openness with which Pfannmüller announced the above-mentioned method of treatment is explicable to me only as a result of cynicism or clumsiness [*Tölpelhaftigkeit*]. Pfannmüller also did not hide the fact that among the children to be murdered were also

children who were not mentally ill, namely children of Jewish parents.⁵⁹

This passage shows a glimpse into the monstrosity of Pfannmüller; the utter lack of humanity for ill or mentally unstable children is sickening enough, but the almost enjoyment found in the murdering the children is entirely inexcusable. The way in which the account describes the exhibition of the child “like a dead rabbit” in combination with Pfannmüller’s “knowing and cynical grin” is unimaginable; children, too weak or incapable to care for themselves were being exterminated on no real psychological basis other than Pfannmüller’s mantra in combination with Hitler’s decree. The truly unnerving point is the pride that beams from Pfannmüller when he does not attempt to hide the murders of other children who were not mentally unstable, but were generally of Jewish decent.⁶⁰ The complete lack of care for life is unnerving in itself, but the fact that the man responsible for it is a psychiatric doctor is even more unsettling.

Pfannmüller cannot be the sole doctor to blame for this. Numerous other doctors were performing similar experiments and those who did not “get their hands dirty” continually endorsed Pfannmüller’s experiments and the reasoning behind the Nazi ideal of “life unworthy of life.” Karl Binding and Alfred Hoche, both professors who abided to Nazi rule and authority, authored *Permitting the Destruction of Unworthy Life* (1920), which heavily influenced and endorsed euthanasia as a “humanitarian response.”⁶¹ This text as a stepping-stone in winning

⁵⁹ Lifton, 33.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Cleaver, 1.

over the medical community as is gave “crucial” and insightful glimpses into why euthanasia should be employed as an entirely human response.⁶²

The look a Dr. Hermann Pfannmüller opens up a multitude of moral issues when the role of a physician is taken into account as well as a medical professional’s duty, if any at all, to the government and society as a whole. The main issue that is found in regards to euthanasia under the Nazi regime is the ideology that Pfannmüller founded his entire practice upon.

The concept that certain quantities of life are more valuable is no foreign idea seeing that racism is found in numerous countries, religious differences pit people against people in order to express a “more qualified” religion and wars and invasion can be based upon the concept of superiority.

Pfannmüller’s explanation for superiority is different due to a few basic concepts. First, the idea that certain people are, simply, a waste of space and are not at all worth the air that they are consuming, is difficult to wrestle with; it changes the definition of “people” to mean those who are fit to live by certain standards.

Secondly, and perhaps the most difficult area to handle, deals with the test subjects and the way in which the euthanasia was conducted. Using children as the initial subjects for euthanasia is terrible and monstrous on its own but the starving of both ill and undesirable children is beyond reproach.

Children are regarded generally as helpless and innocent and, to an extent, Pfannmüller’s implementation of the *sonderkost* and other programs is a pathetic

⁶² Ibid.

excuse for a physician and is a violation of the assumed protection that a physician is supposed to offer his patients.

Pfannmüller was described at the Nuremberg Doctor's Trials as "a brutal fellow who actually enjoyed to dispatch patients to their death" and that he was "most directly responsible" for the killings that occurred at the Eglfing-Harr asylum.⁶³ In 1948, Pfannmüller was found mentally unfit to stand trial and, in 1949, he was sentenced to six years in jail.⁶⁴ Little surfaces as to Pfannmüller's life after his imprisonment except that he died in April 1961 at the age of 75.⁶⁵

Finally, the most disturbing aspect of this program is the idea that a man who is expected to protect life becomes responsible for the mass starvations and drawn-out murders of hundreds of his own people. There is a certain light in which 20-20 hindsight allows people to be displayed as they were, rather than how they were perceived during their lifetimes. Though there is danger in speculation and in reflecting into the past, a fair assumption would be that perhaps Dr. Hermann Pfannmüller felt unworthy of living and therefore had to throw himself into an ideology and a political party that allowed him to exert power over others. Regardless of speculation, looking at programs that Pfannmüller was able to execute under the Nazi regime is certainly a cause to look into those involved in psychiatry in the Third Reich.

The ultimate destruction of Pfannmüller can almost be tempered by the influences by Dr. Karl Brandt. Brandt, a name that often occurs when discussing

⁶³ Lifton, 99.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ernst Klee: *The people lexicon to the Third Reich*, Frankfurt am Main 2007, 458.

Nazi science, is a bit of an outlier when it comes to his contemporaries in the party. Though Pfannmüller is certainly to be considered on the far end of the spectrum, preferring starvation to medical extermination, Brandt falls oddly into a middle, almost mild, category.

In looking at Pfannmüller and the lack of humanism in his experiments, there is almost a psychological need to pull back and look at an administrative perspective of the euthanasia program; Brandt offers this relief. In understanding more about his personality and his upbringing, there is a type of respect, as skewed as it may be, that can be given towards this doctor.

Brandt offers a look into the importance that ideology plays into the directives and directions of a program. The Nazi ideology certainly influenced Brandt into rising to his roles as both co-director of euthanasia and personal physician of Hitler himself. There is a jarring concern in regarding Brandt as a decent man, but even more so as a “decent Nazi.”⁶⁶ This struggle with a person’s humanity and the ideology that they are subscribed to paints a picture that is difficult to understand.

Few Nazi scientists have reached the infamous notation in history as that of Dr. Karl Brandt. Yet, even with the overwhelming evidence of Brandt as potentially one of the worst perpetrators in the Nuremberg Doctor’s Trials, there is a deeper part of Brandt that needs to be examined. In looking at the separate influences that create Brandt as an infamous physician, there is also a necessity to look at the strong ties he had with the regime.

⁶⁶ Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor: Medicine and Power in the Third Reich.” Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Vol. 23. Fall 2009. 313-316.

Dr. Karl Brandt: A Decent Nazi

Though Brandt is often referred to in regard to the euthanasia experiments that occurred under the Third Reich, there is a certain level of importance that comes with the understanding of Brandt's background.⁶⁷ Growing up in a Germany that was consistently under economic and political uncertainty, Brandt was keen to notice what he was capable, and he pursued these capabilities via his ambitions. Brandt was from a line of doctors on his mother's side, and he hoped to one day help create a better and healthier future in which class divisions and social injustice would be overcome.⁶⁸ Brandt's young ambitions in combination with the radical political ideologies that would emerge in the Third Reich were deadly. Brandt had the drive; he only needed the means to fully apply himself.

Brandt's joining of the SS began a long road in which he became more and more indoctrinated to the Nazi regime and its ideals. After gaining membership to the SS, he shortly thereafter became Hitler's personal attending physician. Though the SS would have offered Brandt a fairly decent amount of power in the regime, this immediate connection is where Brandt found his power. With the free access directly to the Fuhrer, this gave Brandt more power and influence than any official position or title.⁶⁹ Even though he had the ultimate connection to Hitler, he still was an active member of the party, receiving such roles as Reich Commissioner of Health

⁶⁷ Schmidt, Ulf. *Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor*. Habledon Continuum. New York, 2007. 30

⁶⁸ Schmidt, 30.

⁶⁹ "Karl Brandt" 313.

and Sanitation per direct request of the Fuhrer.⁷⁰ Karl Brandt's initial inclusion in the Nazi party opened up doors that the ambitious man was more than willing to pursue.

In 1939, Brandt became involved in the activities that would later incriminate him in the Nuremberg Doctor's Trials. On October 6th, Hitler ordered Brandt to "relieve through death" those who fell into the categories of mentally ill or unable to conduct and take part consciously in life.⁷¹ This decree, known commonly as the "Fuhrer Decree" later morphed in to the T4 extermination program. Brandt went a step further and became not only a part of the initial organization of the program, but also became an active part in both segments of the program: children, and later, adults.⁷²

Brandt was selected to run the T4 program over Dr. Leonardo Conti, who was the Health Minister and Reich Health Leader. Though Conti was the logical choice to run the program, Hitler's selection created a new precedent that said infinitely more about the Nazi regime than about the T4 program. By handing over a leadership role to Brandt, Hitler was clearly stating that the Nazi bureaucracy would be made up of those who were loyal and had connections to the Fuhrer, not those who were simply qualified.⁷³

Along with Philipp Bouhler, the head of Chancellery of the Fuhrer, Brandt began to implement the wishes of Hitler, but quickly found himself in a moral issue

⁷⁰ "Karl Brandt" 314.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² "Karl Brandt" 315.

⁷³ Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*. New York: Basic, 1986. Print. Pg 64.

with the euthanasia of Herbert Kretschmar, a mentally handicapped child who had been admitted to a children's clinic in Leipzig with hopes of him "being put to sleep," per his father's requests.⁷⁴ Hitler and Brandt both saw no reason that the child should live, and agreed with the father's petition to euthanize the infant.

The most troubling issue with the Kertchmar case is the fact that no doctors under Brandt questioned his morality or his reasoning for the killing of the infant. Brandt has long after been thought to have potentially been the administer of the tablets that killed Herbert, though no substantial proof points directly at him. It is clear, however, that Brandt's indiscretion towards the medical killing of people flourished, seeing that six months later, he was the first to administer the lethal injections under the "adult" T4 program.⁷⁵

Brandt's involvement in the T4 program truly made it incredibly deadly and increasingly efficient. Under the guise of "creating room for military casualties," thousands of mental patients were continually "evacuated" to other facilities. By removing these patients and then medically executing them, authorities were able to avoid confrontation. This specific segment of the T4 program is referred to as "Aktion Brandt," showing that not only was he involved in the medical extinguishing, but also he was also heavily involved in the development the programs.⁷⁶

Though Bouhler was entirely in charge of the administration and day-to-day euthanasia, along with his numerous subordinates, Brandt was much more focused

⁷⁴ Schmidt, 118.

⁷⁵ Schmidt, 122.

⁷⁶ "Karl Brandt" 315.

upon the medical aspects of the program. Brandt was in charge of selecting doctors as well as making the decision as to how the euthanasia would be administered.⁷⁷ This method, which included the inhalation of gasses for adults and the overdosing of lethal tablets for children, makes Brandt seem less evil in his administration. His actions can almost be justified, due to the fact that he was focused upon removing those “unfit” from society, seemingly for their own good. Brandt was consciously concerned about the most humane way in which to dispose of the “unwanted” and even went as far as to include Hitler into the conversation as to the most humane way to send people through the T4 program.⁷⁸ Brandt also believed entirely that lethal injections and gassings needed to remain in the hands of doctors because the “killing of tens of thousands [was] a ‘medical’ operation.”⁷⁹

While working in the T4 program, some of Brandt’s assistants were sent to Odilo Globocnik who was instrumental in the creating of Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka, which were other death camps which carried out similar executions that were created under the T4 program. The camaraderie formed by this transfer allowed for the transfer of 15-20 thousand concentration camp prisoners to be sent to killing centers under the Aktion 14f13.⁸⁰ Brandt also was in full correspondence with Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and in control of the concentration camps, and the head of SS Economic Administrative Office, Oswald Pohl, often asking the SS for prisoners. Brandt would use said prisoners to conduct his own experiments,

⁷⁷ Schmidt 135.

⁷⁸ Schmidt, 137.

⁷⁹ Schmidt, 140.

⁸⁰ “Karl Brandt” 315.

including those dealing with hepatitis, phosphorus burns and biomedical agents.⁸¹ The interesting note here is that these experimentations fall under a legitimate concern; by monitoring and continually checking patients vitals, there was the capability to see the impact of hepatitis, phosphorus burns and biomedical agents. Much like testing rats in a lab, Brandt's intentions were to help create and further medical knowledge about these areas.

The way in which Brandt regards human life is unfathomable and horrendous by any moral standards, and yet, the scientific ways in which he conducted himself and his brigade of physicians is impeccable; Brandt was known for following every protocol of being a physician. The doctor aspect of Karl Brandt is textbook: he conducted his experiments thoroughly and all remained professional, only without the notion of morality or the Hippocratic oath. This division creates an incredible amount of uneasiness when regarding Brandt as a "decent Nazi," as his fellow Nazi leaders often referred to him.⁸²

Brandt and Hitler knew full well that the experiments that were being conducted were not of the most legal sense (seeing that consent was not given by patients), so Brandt was always introduced in early meetings with doctors and psychiatrists as the Nazi medical leader to give him as much credibility as was possible. Hitler did fear that if news of what was really occurring in the T4 program got out, it would entirely fuel enemy propaganda and, for this reason, no legislation was officially passed in which the euthanasia program was considered illegal.⁸³ This meant that

⁸¹ "Karl Brandt" 316.

⁸² "Karl Brandt" 314.

⁸³ Lifton, 64.

the doctors were not violating any laws that came into play in the medical sphere, but rather were in severe violations of their Hippocratic oath as well as moral codes regarding humanity (i.e. murder).

Perhaps another way to stomach the T4 program and all the other “medical” killings under Brandt is to understand his view of human experimentation. In a series of interviews from 1945, Brandt explained that human experimentation had occurred “in one way or another” for centuries and that medical procedures, such as surgeries, were explained as human experimentation.⁸⁴ Even with this understanding, Brandt’s interviews show that those who were selected were not volunteers, which raises a whole new set of moral issues with Brandt’s work.⁸⁵ Brandt is also implicated in having knowledge as to what was occurring in the concentration camps, stating later that he was “aware of some of the freezing experiments at Dachau,” but refused to give up anything more for fear of further incriminating himself right before the Nuremberg Doctor’s Trials.⁸⁶

Brandt’s involvement in the Nazi regime forces questions of morality and human consciousness to the surface, even years later. The ability of an ambitious and clearly effective physician to become so heavily indoctrinated and absorbed into an euthanasia operation is scary to say the least. Brandt as a doctor is increasingly difficult to comprehend because he does a few things in his experiments and in the conduct of his occupation that are positive and in accordance with code, and yet the ability to medically justify hundreds of thousands of deaths is incomprehensible,

⁸⁴ Schmidt, 255.

⁸⁵ Schmidt, 256.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

especially coming from a medical professional. Karl Brandt presents the paradox of a “decent Nazi” perfectly.

Speculation to Brandt’s “decency” as a Nazi is certainly a conversation that will continue, yet there are those who fall into a category all their own. While Brandt was conducting experiments and running the overall euthanasia program, there was a man who was known for his efficiency, durability, and ingenuity. These skills alone are sought after, yet when combined with Nazi idealism and free reign, they are increasingly detrimental.

Christian Wirth, a man who made Nazi camps function more efficiently, was called in to be the “fixer” of Nazi ideas. Wirth, who had been a part of the Nazi party’s ideology from its start, was wholeheartedly involved and engrossed in making the killing of people go as smoothly as possible.

Unlike Pfannmüller and Brandt, Wirth was not heavily involved in experimentations nor was he a certified doctor. This distinction allows Wirth to rise to high commands of the party via pure ambition. Wirth, as mentioned, was not keen on the medical experimentation within the camps, purely because it disrupted the flow of extermination.

Wirth, therefore, can be viewed as a medical case himself. He was involved in the euthanasia programs, but the combination of efficiency, ambition, and Nazi ideology created a new type of monster. Wirth’s role in the program effectively made him unfit to ever survive in normal society again. Wirth’s attributes, though commendable on their own, became skewed and brutal under the influence of the

Nazi ideology, which creates a slightly different lens to regard the euthanasia program.

In regarding the multiple men who made up the euthanasia programs in the Nazi concentration camps, the name Wirth is synonymous with Belzec and, eventually, with becoming the Inspector of SS-Sonderkommandos Action Reinhard.⁸⁷ Wirth took over multiple facets of the Nazi euthanasia incentive, and many only helped to perpetuate his brutal efficiency and dedication to his duty.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Trueman, Chris. "Christian Wirth." *Christian Wirth*. HistoryLearningSite, 2013. Web. 13 Mar. 2014

⁸⁸ Trueman.

Christian Wirth: The Euthanasia Specialist

"He was a tall, broad shouldered man in his middle forties with a vulgar face. He was a born criminal, the 'extreme beast'." –Rudolf Reder, a survivor of Belzec.

Wirth (1885-1944) grew up as a trained carpenter and police officer who later served in World War I, where he received numerous medals, indicating his bravery.⁸⁹ Wirth returned to his previous occupations at the end of the war and in 1931, joined the S.A. (Brownshirts).⁹⁰ This would lead to his eventual integration into the S.S. in 1939 and the *Kriminalkommissar* of the Stuttgart criminal police, which was a specific department of the Gestapo.⁹¹ Wirth's ability to remain in the Stuttgart police force helped him to enter and rise quickly through the ranks of the Nazi regime.

By the end of 1939, Wirth was already "specializing" in the euthanasia treatment of the criminally insane; these first experiments involved the gassing of Germans who were "incurably insane."⁹² At this point, Wirth had garnered the title of SS-Obersturmführer and while overseeing the gassings at Grafeneck psychiatric ward, he also worked with Kurt Franz, who later became a camp commander of Treblinka.⁹³ By 1940, Wirth had become an inspector of the multiple euthanasia

⁸⁹ "Wirth, Christian." *Learning About the Holocaust: A Student's Guide*. Ed. Ronald M. Smelser. Vol. 4. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2001. 139-140. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 11 Mar. 2014.

⁹⁰ Trueman.

⁹¹ "Wirth, Christian." *Learning*.

⁹² "Wirth, Christian." *Learning*.

⁹³ Trueman.

establishments in and around Germany.⁹⁴ Wirth moved quickly and between 1939 and 1940, had moved into the more “traditional” vein of Nazi concentration camps.

Wirth went to Northern Germany and led the gassing experiments as the administrator of Brandenburg. While there, he is credited with the first gassings to utilize carbon monoxide; this practice, with suggestions from Phillip Bouler, led to the disguising of gas chambers as showers.⁹⁵ This suggestion, though horrifying, was immediately accepted and utilized in the Nazi concentration camps, mainly in hopes that it was not alert or alarm those being ushered into the chambers. The unit at Brandenburg offered Wirth the “playground” that he needed and combined with what he had learned in the psychiatric ward at Grafenhenck, he was able to propel himself towards the head of the euthanasia program in Germany and Austria by mid-1940

In September 1941, he was sent to Lublin, Poland to establish the first euthanasia center outside the Reich.⁹⁶ This initial center at Lublin turned into the establishment of five separate euthanasia centers in Poland, the first of these would later become Chelmno, a camp associated with Operation Reinhard.⁹⁷

There is an obscure gap between the abandonment of the five centers in Lublin to Wirth’s resurfacing at Belzec around December 25, 1941.⁹⁸ Wirth became the first commandant of the camp, and is quoted as having told his S.S. men “in

⁹⁴ “Wirth, Christian.” *Learning*.

⁹⁵ Trueman.

⁹⁶ Trueman.

⁹⁷ “Wirth, Christian.” *Learning*.

⁹⁸ “Christian Wirth.” *Christian Wirth*. Aktion Reinhard Camps, 18 June 2005. Web. 13 Mar. 2014.

Belzec, all the Jews are to be killed.”⁹⁹ It was here that the S.S. men nicknamed Wirth *Christian der Grausame* (Christian the Savage) and was known for developing an extremely brutal manner in which the gassings were carried out.¹⁰⁰ The high doses of the gas would be considered excess and the physical assaults that occurred before the gassings were entirely unnecessary. Perhaps Josef Oberhauser, an SS officer who would later be the only officer convicted of war crimes at Belzec, stated the best description of Wirth as the commandant: “His dominant features were an iron hardness, unconditional obedience, belief in the Führer, absolute heartlessness and ruthlessness.”¹⁰¹ Wirth was beyond making a name for himself in the euthanasia project; he was at the forefront of the hierarchy.

Within Belzec, Wirth established a hierarchy system, appointing *Sonderkommandos* from the first trains that arrived at the center. *Sonderkommandos* were Jewish males that were selected for their physical abilities and the capabilities to control other Jews while being in contact with the SS officers.¹⁰² He then allowed for the appointing of *oberkapos* and *kapos*- Jews who had the authority to supervise other Jews.¹⁰³ Wirth personally selected 80-100 young men off the transports to be the center of the work force in the camp. From there, they would select *kapos* to oversee separate work-brigades; their duties were clearly laid out by Wirth himself and, in the early days of Belzec, Wirth was known to address the Jews upon their

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Shields, Jacqueline. "Concentration Camps: The Sonderkommando." *The Sonderkommando*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2014. Web. 23 Apr. 2014.

¹⁰³ Trueman.

initial arrival.¹⁰⁴ Wirth assured the transports that they were merely at a transit camp and upon hearing that they were to be given a bath before being resettled, many of the Jews cheered Wirth after his speech.¹⁰⁵ This scene, in hindsight, is truly indicative of the heartlessness and devotion that Wirth had.

Wirth is known not only for his abuses towards the Jewish population, but also towards those who were commanders under him. Wirth was documented as “whipping a Jewess of about 40 in the face and chasing her into the gas chamber,” by Kurt Gerstein.¹⁰⁶ Wirth also ordered that a transit of children and infants be buried alive in a large pit.¹⁰⁷ Gerstein went on to explain a scene in which Wirth savagely beat a Ukrainian S.S. member in the face for being unable to start an engine that was linked to the gas chambers.¹⁰⁸ As shown, the S.S. guards were under a decent amount of scrutiny. Wirth was known to lead route marches around the camp to prohibit the lazy lifestyles of the guards.¹⁰⁹ As stated by Werener Dubois, a S.S. guard at Belzec:

“Wirth was more than brutal. In my opinion, his brutality was grounded more in his human nature than his political mentality. He bellowed, screamed and threatened us, and hit members of the German garrison in the face. Other than

¹⁰⁴ “Christian Wirth.” *Christian Wirth*. Aktion Reinhard.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Trueman.

¹⁰⁹ Trueman.

Oberhauser, there was no-one at Belzec who was not afraid of Wirth.¹¹⁰

Wirth was feared, by many, if not all, who had contact with him for his inability to tolerate anything less than perfection. The idea that Oberhauser was the only man who was not afraid of Wirth creates an alarming image of Oberhauser.

Joseph Oberhauser was an S.S. guard who was prominent in Belzec and, ultimately, was the only conviction made at the Belzec trials in August of 1963.¹¹¹ His colleagues in Belzec, specifically due to his association with Wirth, and the arrogant aloofness that he maintained as head S.S. guard, condemned Oberhauser.¹¹² At his trial, all the witnesses corroborated in saying that Wirth's word was law and the fear of discipline caused no challenge on their parts. Because Oberhauser had no issue following Wirth, he had no reason to fear his commandant, even after he left the camp to return to Berlin.¹¹³

In June 1942, Oberhauser returned to Belzec to find it almost entirely desolate. *S.S.-scharfuhrer* Feix was commanding about 20 Ukrainian guards. Wirth had, for all intents and purposes, disappeared.¹¹⁴ Oberhauser stated that Wirth had gone to Berlin and had not first reported to Odilo Globocnik (the head of the SS), which showed that Wirth did not consider Globocnik to be his superior.¹¹⁵ Though there is little satisfactory evidence for Wirth's sudden disappearance, it can be

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ "The Belzec Trials – The Station Master at Treblinka HolocaustResearchProject.org." *The Belzec Trials – The Station Master at Treblinka* www.HolocaustResearchProject.org. H.E.A.R.T., 2007. Web. 13 Mar. 2014.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ "Christian Wirth." *Christian Wirth*. Aktion Reinhard

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

inferred that the departure from Belzec was to receive instructions for the main phase of *Aktion Reinhard*, of which Globocnik was the head commander.¹¹⁶ Wirth was soon given the title of *Inspekteur der SS-Sonderkommandos Aktion Reinhard* and based himself in Lublin.¹¹⁷

Wirth's first task was to reorganize Treblinka, which had fallen into disarray under the incompetency of the former commander, Dr. Irnfried Eberl.¹¹⁸ Wirth visited the camp mid-August 1942 and remained there as Franz Stangl was brought in from Sobibor (another camp that was part of the Aktion Reinhard operation) to control and command Treblinka.¹¹⁹ The camp temporarily stopped transports so that Wirth would be able to enlarge and make the camp function much more efficiently. Wirth had multiple meetings with his S.S. staff and enlarged the gas chambers, with the help of Erwin Lambert, who was a T4 expert in gas chamber construction. Wirth also demanded that the chambers in Sobibor be enhanced to hold more bodies, seeing that they were facing the same issues of overcrowding.¹²⁰

During this time (from 1940-1942), Wirth was responsible for aiding in the supervised killings of 1.5 million Jews from Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka.¹²¹ His reorganization allowed for a large influx of transits to be shipped in and handled by both Treblinka and Sobibor.¹²² In December 1942, Wirth was tasked with overseeing the slave labor camps that were based out of Lublin and the surrounding

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Trueman.

¹¹⁹ "Christian Wirth." *Christian Wirth*. Aktion Reinhard

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ "Wirth, Christian." *Learning*.

¹²² Trueman.

areas. He stayed at the nearby Lublin airfield; the same location where clothes and objects that had been confiscated from the Jews were sorted and stored. The Jews were employed at local factories and were under the same unyieldingly, brutal control of Wirth.¹²³ SS-man Erich Bauer witnessed how Wirth treated the Jewish workers there:

I myself have seen and remember for certain how the Jews employed there were pouring fresh, hot tar onto the pasteboard with bare hands. I also saw the raw flesh peeled from their fingers, so that their bare bones could be seen. I am convinced that all these people died of their bad burns. I remember this work with the tar-paper so well, because I was upset by it at the time, and Wirth hit me in the face with his whip.¹²⁴

Even when located in a different setting, there was no doubt that Wirth's merciless nature and desire for perfection (and the punishment of the Jews) reigned supreme. Wirth was to be feared not only for his violence, but also for his impeccable ability to revolutionize the efficiency of mass killings.

In the summer of 1943, Wirth was promoted to SS-Sturmbanführer . After the revolt in Treblinka (August 2, 1943), Wirth along with Globocnik and Stangl and their SS men of *Aktion Reinhard*, drove a convoy to Trieste.¹²⁵ There, they disguised

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ "Christian Wirth." *Christian Wirth. Aktion Reinhard*

¹²⁵ "Wirth, Christian." *Learning*.

a gassing chamber and an incinerator under the façade of a rice mill; this was the attempt to kill the Jews of the Trieste region, as well as hasten the deportation of those that they could not kill.¹²⁶ Wirth traveled back to Lublin in November 1943 for a temporary visit. While there, Jakob Sporrenberg, who had taken over control from Globocnik, stated that it was Wirth who had been placed in command of *Aktion Reinhard* and had been the officer to read the official order from Himmler to exterminate all Jews working in labor camps in the Lublin District (*Aktion Erntefest*).¹²⁷ On May 26 1944, Wirth was killed in street fighting by Yugoslav partisans whilst on his way to Fiume; Stangl stated that he had seen Wirth's body.

128

In looking throughout all the *aktionen* that Wirth was involved with, it is disturbing to see the growth and praise that he received. Wirth was a very detail-oriented soldier, able to engineer the most efficient solutions for some of the most distressing issues facing the concentration camps. Of the men who were involved in the concentration camps, especially those who took part in *Aktion Reinhard*, there are few who can be seen as "hands-on" as Wirth. Starting in Belzec, Wirth was a commander who took an active role in both his prisoners and, to the dismay of his men, the S.S. guards who reported to him.

Wirth was beyond involved in the eradication of the Jews; he was totally absorbed in making the processes run faster and smoother to kill more in less time. Some Nazi commanders, Hitler included, can be seen as partially removed from the

¹²⁶ "With, Christian." *Learning*.

¹²⁷ "Christian Wirth." *Christian Wirth*. *Aktion Reinhard*.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*.

actual killings in WWII concentration camps. Christian Wirth cannot be separated from his active role, nor did he want to be during his involvement in the Nazi party until 1944.

Wirth's deportation to the Trieste region raises some interesting speculations. Perhaps, due to his inability to every enter into normal society again; the Nazi party felt the need to exterminate him themselves. At the time of his departure, the camps were running as efficiently as possible and there was no longer a need for the ambitious-hungry "fixer" to continue. Wirth's placement in Trieste brings up serious questions about the ramifications of programs like T-4 and the influence that they can have on those in charge of implementing them. Wirth's downward spiral paints an ugly picture of Nazi ideology and ambition.

Conclusion: Importance of Nazi Doctors

By focusing the lens on specific doctors that were involved with the T-4 program, there is a rounded out understanding of the different ways in which experiments and positions were achieved. The caveat is, however, that these scientists could have only survived in this specific environment. Everything had to align in order for them to continue with euthanasia in the ways that they did.

For example, Pfannmüller can be regarded as successful in his starving experimentation on children. His insights and notes garner countless data upon the stages and levels of malnourishment and, at the time, he was doing his job by eradicating the population from those thought to be “unfit.” Yet, had Pfannmüller not subscribed to the Nazi regime, he would not have had the tools and the subjects to play out his experiments.

Likewise, the same issue occurs with Brandt. Brandt was a strong leader and coordinator. He gained the trust of Hitler, not only in the running of the euthanasia program, but also in being his personal physician and confidante. Brandt, at the time, was considered to be an incredible advisor and he was crucial in the implementation of Hitler’s T-4 program.

Wirth may be the most extreme example, yet even his work was critical in the workings of all the camps. Wirth was vital in making processes faster and more efficient; without Wirth, there is no way that the programs or the camps would have functioned like the well-oiled machines that they were. Wirth placed in the perfect circumstances for his particular set of problem solving skills.

In looking at all their qualities, two main points stand out. First, each of the aforementioned men had increasingly high amounts of ambition. This ambition, in combination with their personal, usually medical, interests and the promises of the Nazi party allowed for the perfect environment. Not to say that everything went smoothly for the men, but their ambition certainly helped in their attainment of substantial presence in the Nazi party.

The second, and more disturbing comment that can be made is that, without looking at what the euthanasia really did to the population of the Volk and eventually spread beyond, each of these men would have an incredible impressive resume. Their personalities, skills, and achievements were exactly what made the medical portion of the Nazi party so impressive. When it is brought to light that their jobs all focused around the murders of innocent people, that's when there is an issue.

Each of these men had another trait in common. Though they certainly traipsed through their respective ranks in the party, eventually there is a realization that these men cannot return and function in normal society. Pfannmüller, for example, disappeared off the map for decades until his death in 1975. Brandt created a paradox of himself: he was a medical professional that could justify the murder of unfathomable patients. Though much more normalized than the other cases presented, Brandt did not belong back in normalized society.

Again, perhaps the clearest indication of the disintegration of Nazi scientists is found in Wirth. Wirth, as mentioned, was sent to the front lines in the Trieste region. This region was nowhere near where he was located, and if he had been

wanted in the party, more likely he would have been reassigned to Berlin. The fact that he was sent into a warzone with active fighting suggests that the Nazis realized the danger in keeping a man like Wirth alive. He enjoyed his job too much. Wirth prided himself on being able to kill more and more humans with his innovations and that is certainly not a skill set that would be necessary after 1945.

The conclusion then becomes that though ambitious, the Nazi doctors ultimately can be correlated with the unraveling of the German race. By exterminating hundreds of thousands of innocent German people and becoming dangers to traditional society, they threw out the foundation of what had been a thriving and decent society.

Looking back at Buchenwald, there is certainly a desire to uncover more. Simple changes, lack of records, altered buildings and overall discrepancies should prompt further looks into the Nazi medical initiatives, especially when these small, seemingly unimportant details can lead to so much more discovery as to the ethical practices of the unethical Nazi medical community.

Bibliography

- "The Belzec Trials – The Station Master at Treblinka HolocaustResearchProject.org."
The Belzec Trials – The Station Master at Treblinka
Www.HolocaustResearchProject.org. H.E.A.R.T., 2007. Web. 13 Mar. 2014.
- Berenbaum, Michael. "T4 Program (Nazi Policy)." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.
 Encyclopedia Britannica, 2 Jan. 2014. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.
- "Buchenwald Concentration Camp." *Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies :
 University of Minnesota*. Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2009. Web.
 05 Aug. 2013.
- "Buchenwald Concentration Camp (Germany)." *Buchenwald Concentration Camp
 (Germany)*. Ancestry.com and Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2014. Web. 15
 Apr. 2014.
- "Buchenwald Liberation Photos Show Holocaust Horrors On Anniversary Of Nazi
 Concentration Camp Closing." *The World Post*. The Huffington Post, 11 Apr.
 2013. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.
- "Christian Wirth." *Christian Wirth*. Aktion Reinhard Camps, 18 June 2005. Web. 13
 Mar. 2014.
- Cleaver, Cathleen A., and Edward Grant. "Lessons From History's Most Calamitous
 Experience." *Biography Resource Center*. Gale, n.d. Web. 8 Aug. 2013.
- "Edward R. Murrow's Report From Buchenwald." *Edward R. Murrow's Report From
 Buchenwald*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, n.d. Web. 15 Apr.
 2014.
- "Experiments with Poison." *Jewish Virtual Library*. The American-Israeli Cooperation
 Enterprise, 2013. Web. 05 Aug. 2013.
- "Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor: Medicine and Power in the Third Reich." Holocaust
 and Genocide Studies. Vol. 23. Fall 2009.
- Klee, Ernst. *The People Lexicon to the Third Reich*. Frankfurt: Main 2007.
- Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide*.
 New York: Basic, 1986. Print.
- Meltzer, Milton. *Never to Forget*, New York: HarperCollins, 1976.

- "The Nazi Euthanasia (T-4) Program." *Background & Overview of the Nazi Euthanasia (T-4) Program*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2014. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.
- Röder, Thomas, Volker Kubillus, and Anthony Burwell. *Psychiatrists-- the Men behind Hitler: The Architects of Horror*. Los Angeles: Freedom Pub., 1995. Print.
- Quinn, Megan. "Nazi Science in the Camps." *Nazi Science in the Camps*. Webster University, n.d. Web. 18 Oct. 2013.
- Schmidt, Ulf. *Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor*. Habledon Continuum. New York, 2007.
- Shields, Jacqueline. "Concentration Camps: The Sonderkommando." *The Sonderkommando*. American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2014. Web. 23 Apr. 2014.
- "The Statistics of Buchenwald." Jewish Virtual Library. The American-Israeli Cooperation Enterprise, 2013. Web. 05 Aug. 2013.
- Trueman, Chris. "Christian Wirth." *Christian Wirth*. HistoryLearningSite, 2013. Web. 13 Mar. 2014
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Buchenwald." Holocaust Encyclopedia. Washington D.C.: USHMM: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2013.
- "Wirth, Christian." *Learning About the Holocaust: A Student's Guide*. Ed. Ronald M. Smelser. Vol. 4. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2001. 139-140. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Web. 11 Mar. 2014.